

Developing the Business Case for Post-Qualifying Awards in Social Work

A Resource for Learning and Workforce Development Managers

Skills for Care London

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This document has been developed as a resource tool for learning and workforce development managers, who increasingly find themselves in the position of needing to develop a business case to present to senior managers, in order to secure funding for employees within their organisation to undertake Post-Qualifying (PQ) Awards.

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This document draws upon research, key policy drivers and professional standards to inform the rationale behind the benefits of investing in PQ and highlights how PQ Awards inter-relate to the broader context of workforce planning and organisational needs. Various practice examples are also included to demonstrate how some London Boroughs link PQ to reward systems for staff, recruitment and retention strategies and also undertake collaborative commissioning of PQ training.

It is hoped this resource will provide a useful tool for learning and workforce development managers who are either new to their position, or for more experienced staff who are struggling to identify the broader rationale for investing in PQ awards.

It is not envisaged that every element of this document would be incorporated into a business case, rather relevant components can be drawn upon that are pertinent to your workforce and organisational needs.

(This resource tool has been developed to compliment the existing document 'Workforce Planning for PQ - An Employers Guide to Implementing the Post-Qualifying Framework for Social Work Training' (SfC/CWDC, 2006). It is recommended that you refer to this document when developing your workforce planning strategies for PQ).



Introduction

“Employees in workforce development often provide the interface between programme providers and the strategic managers of their organisation. This is a vital role if the intention of making the new PQ framework responsive to employers’ needs is to be achieved. Strong links between operational services and workforce development are essential for this.”
(Owens, 2007)

Section one

The positive impact of post-qualifying awards from the perspective of candidates, teams, organisations and people who use services

Since the commencement of PQ in 1992, research evaluating the impact of the Awards has been somewhat limited. However, from the various pieces of research that have been undertaken*, themes of evidence are revealed that support PQ has had a positive impact.



Organisations vary significantly in terms of their level of commitment and financial investment in supporting their social work employees to undertake post-qualifying (PQ) awards in social work.

There are no specific government targets for the numbers of social workers that should undertake PQ awards. The Department of Health no longer ring-fences grant money for local authority spending on these awards. Therefore it has now become increasingly necessary for learning and workforce development staff to provide a strong business case to senior managers as to why investment in PQ should remain an important part of an organisations workforce planning and strategy.

This document aims to highlight some of the key components towards building the business case for supporting access to PQ awards for social workers.

Key factors covered:

- The positive impact of post-qualifying awards from the perspective of candidates, teams, organisations and people who use services
- Development of career pathways
- Linking PQ to the modernisation agenda and inter-professional working
- Links to standards and inspection drivers
- Post-qualifying awards and how they can benefit recruitment and retention opportunities.

“Generally, one important outcome of doing the Post-Qualifying Award is that it has enabled me to think more critically about my practice. More specifically, the law module has enabled me to locate my work within the wider legal context, something I had not previously done.”
(PQ candidate, Barnardo's, London)

Impact on the Professional Development of the Candidates

- Increased personal and professional confidence
- Greater understanding of policy and legislation leading to improved understanding of statutory roles and duty of care
- Improved understanding of assessment procedures
- Increased awareness of the perspective of people who use services
- Greater willingness and ability to manage complex cases
- Greater confidence with providing evidence based practice
- Revitalised interest in social work as a profession.

Impact on the Team

- Other team members become motivated to take up learning and development opportunities
- Sharing of information from the PQ programme keeps the whole team up-to-date on issues
- Generation of new ideas
- Increased skills base of the team.

Impact on the Organisation and Quality of Service Delivery for People who use Services

- Improved standards of professional practice
- Improved ability to meet the needs of vulnerable people
- Introduction of new ideas and ways of working
- An effective means to ensuring practice and performance requirements are met.

*Examples of research

Doel, M., Flynn, E., Nelson, P., (2006) 'Experiences of Post-Qualifying Study in Social Work', Sheffield Hallam University

Maitland, P., (2002) 'The Employers' Perspective of the Post-Qualifying Award Programme and their View of Future Developments'. London: GLPQ

McCloskey, C. (2006) 'Evaluating the Impact of Post-Qualifying Social Work'. Centre for Post-Qualifying Social Work (CPQSW), Bournemouth University

Rowland, M. (2006) 'West Midlands Regional Post-Qualifying Consortium Post Hoc Survey Evaluation: 2006', unpublished survey

Section two

Development of career pathways

People will be encouraged to develop a career in social care if there are clearly defined roles and pathways, which make it easy for people to see the range of options and possibilities. People are also more likely to develop a career in social care if they have opportunities to develop skills and qualifications that are transferable to other settings, are able to demonstrate their competence and are helped to progress in a direction which meets their needs and the needs of the service.”

(SfC/CWDC, 2006)



The modernisation agenda has sought to improve the quality of social care standards and the development of a professional and competent workforce. Defining the roles of social workers and ensuring a link between these roles, training and qualifications is seen as integral to improving standards, career opportunities and professional status.

Although social work has traditionally lacked clear career pathways, the revised PQ framework is designed to assist with developing a structure by which employers will be able to link attainment of particular modules to specified posts or career progression.

The revised PQ framework consists of three combined academic and professional awards:

- Post-Qualifying Award in Specialist Social Work
- Post-Qualifying Award in Higher Specialist Social Work
- Advanced Award in Social Work.

Career pathway options:

- Leadership and Management
- Children and Families
- Mental Health Social Work
- Social Work with Adults
- Practice Education.

“The importance of career structures in social work: a robust and comprehensive framework of relevant and assessed professional development is an essential underpinning to the development of career structures and progression in the profession which will enable it to achieve higher levels of performance and accountability.”

(DHSSPSNI, 2004)

PQ and Mental Health Social Work

The new Mental Health Act 2007 will soon see the introduction of an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) role. The AMHP role will replace the Approved Social Worker (ASW) role. ASWs will take on the AMHP role but it will also be extended to other mental

health professionals in addition to social workers. Likewise, the AMHP training will replace that of the ASW training within the revised PQ framework, with new PQ programmes being developed that will be open to inter-professionals as well as social workers.

Practice example from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets

The London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham and Hackney have worked collaboratively in partnership with Middlesex University since 2003 in order to provide Approved Social Worker (ASW) training for mental health social workers within the PQ Framework. Commissioning the training with neighbouring boroughs has resulted in a cost effective training programme that has been delivered in-house to staff. Inception of the revised framework resulted in some changes to our existing programme in order to meet the new standards required by the GSCC.

The boroughs worked with Middlesex University to turn the course into one which the university could validate and this was done in May 2007. This has enabled the course to continue and it will next run in March 2008.

Since ASW training was placed within the PQ framework the ASW role has become a clearly defined career pathway for social workers within adult mental health services Tower Hamlets have been able to link the attainment of this award to salary progression.

Jan Hill,
Adults Services Learning
& Development Manager,
London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Section three

Linking Post-Qualifying Awards to the modernisation agenda and inter-professional working

The government's modernisation agenda has led to significant changes to the context of service delivery. Social care white papers such as Every Child Matters: Next Steps (DfES, 2004) and Our Health, Our Care, Our Say (DoH, 2006) are leading to new ways of working for social workers necessitating a change in roles, responsibilities and tasks.

“Post-Qualifying Learning (PQL) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)...make a significant contribution to the modernisation agenda by helping to deliver workforce targets and developing the current workforce for example, by acting as a vehicle for changes in practice.”
(DoH, 2004)

The government drivers also include the integration of services between social care and partner agencies such as health, education and housing, resulting in services increasingly being delivered by multi-professional teams. In order to make joint decisions and to attain an improvement in the quality of service delivery, it is imperative that social workers and their allied professionals are able to work collaboratively, sharing knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

The National Occupational Standards for Social Work (TOPSS/SfC, 2002), require social workers to respect the roles and expertise of workers from other agencies whilst having an ability to work in partnership with them.

The PQ framework provides an excellent vehicle for developing a shared understanding amongst professionals from different disciplines and agencies in order to achieve co-ordinated outcomes.

Findings from inquiries such as the Laming Report (2003) have highlighted inter-professional practice and education as a prerequisite to good practice. The PQ framework provides an opportunity to support that.

Various commentators have suggested that inter-professional training can help different professionals to:

- Build confidence in order to work collaboratively
- Develop a shared understanding of roles
- Challenge professional stereotypes
- Improve communication and information sharing
- Share and develop knowledge and skills
- Improve assessment of people who use services
- Achieve better outcomes in service delivery. (Freeth et al, 2006)

“The revised PQ framework has a strong inter-professional and multi-agency orientation. It will enable social workers and other professionals to study alongside one another and ensure that all social workers have a strong grounding in inter-professional and inter-agency working while simultaneously developing their social work professionalism.”
(GSCC, 2005)

PQ Inter-professional Programme Example – City University

City University provides an MSc in Interprofessional Practice for experienced practitioners from health, social work, the police, education and the voluntary sector. Two of the pathways on the MSc are currently recognised for the Higher Specialist/Advanced Award in Social Work. These are Society, Violence and Practice (SVP) for practitioners who work with survivors of violence and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health pathway.

The programmes are practice orientated and integral to them is an exploration of what it means to be inter-professional in the practitioner's own discipline and context drawing on organisational, systemic and psychodynamic ideas. The programmes also use a variety of teaching methods including expert panels with panellists from child psychiatrists (CAHMS route) to Jane Zito and survivors of the London bombings (SVP route), reflective practice and enquiry based learning and have been developed in partnership with organisations such as Newham Asian Women's Project and Young Minds.

Jeanette Copperman,
Senior Lecturer in Social Work,
City University

An initial exploration of outcomes on practice for some participants on the City University Inter-professional Practice MSc found that the course helped to enhance participants' confidence and knowledge of issues linked to inter-professional working. The participants saw themselves as more equipped to address inter-professional communication and collaboration problems.
(Reeves and Sully, 2007)

However a scoping study carried out in 8 London boroughs suggested that although social work agencies felt that inter-professional training and education were important, in the face of competing priorities it could be hard for agencies to prioritise inter-professional training. The PQ framework offers an important opportunity to support this aspect of training. (Newton and Copperman, 2005)

Section four

Links to standards and inspection drivers

The revised Post-Qualifying Awards effectively link to various quality assured social care standards, professional requirements and inspection drivers, some of which are listed below.



General Social Care Council (GSCC) Codes of Practice

In September 2002 GSCC produced codes of practice for social care workers and their employers outlining the standards of conduct and practice within which they should work. These codes clearly identify responsibilities regarding training and development for both employers and social workers as follows:

The responsibility of Employers

Point 3 states:
“As a social care employer, you must provide training and development opportunities to enable social care workers to strengthen and develop their skills and knowledge.”
(GSCC, 2002)

Although there are a variety of ways that employers can meet this standard, PQ programmes are a recognised and effective means by which employers can provide the required training and learning opportunities for their qualified social workers.

The responsibility of Social Workers

Point 6 states:
“As a social care worker, you must be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills.”
(GSCC, 2002)

The PQ framework meets required standards for improving the knowledge and skills of social work practitioners.

Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL)

All social workers are required to demonstrate they have undertaken continuing professional development (CPD) in order to renew their GSCC registration after a 3 year period. Although CPD requirements can be fulfilled by a variety of means, candidates studying for a PQ award should be able to easily evidence the required 15 days or 90 hours of PRTL within a 3 year period. Hence, PQ is an excellent means by which PRTL requirements can be achieved.

National Minimum Standards and Performance Indicators for Local Authorities

“Care services may be registered and inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), whose role it is to improve the experiences of people who use services. CSCI does this through the inspection and assessment of services against the National Minimum Standards (NMS) and the performance indicators for local authorities. When carrying out these assessments, CSCI inspectors may ask to see evidence of continuing professional development across a staff team. The reason they ask is that good quality care services ensure that their staff have access to learning opportunities.”
(Skills for Care, 2006)

In addition, National Minimum Standards specify that all staff should be appropriately skilled, qualified and supervised. Therefore, by supporting employees with undertaking PQ awards, organisations can be confident that they are not only meeting National Minimum Standards, but are also contributing to maintaining a highly skilled and appropriately qualified workforce.

Performance Indicators for Local Authorities

Although there is no one specific performance indicator relating to PQ, it is measured within the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) of Children's Services which is carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and CSCI. There is a question that asks for: “the percentage of social workers and residential managers working with children who need to obtain the childcare post-qualifying award (PQ) (now the similar equivalent to the specialist award) who have achieved the PQ1 award (now the similar equivalent to the consolidation module) in child care.”

At the time of writing, the outcome of this measurement within the APA contributes towards the overall star rating for a local authority.

Practice Learning as a Performance Indicator*

Practice education is an integral part of the revised PQ framework at specialist level, and necessitates the teaching, mentoring, supporting and assessing of another person in the workplace which could include a social work student on an assessed practice learning placement.

The number of assessed practice learning days offered to social work students is one of the many performance indicators set for local authorities.

Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) indicators for local authorities are used by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) to assess the performance of councils with social services responsibilities, which in turn contributes to the star rating of a council.
(CSCI, 2006)

Section four continued

CSCI defines the rationale for including practice learning as an indicator as follows:

“Development of sufficient quality, quantity and diversity of practice learning opportunities for social work students is critical for the successful delivery of the new social work degree. The focus on this information is part of the wider aim to encourage councils to make the link between effective service delivery, robust human resource strategies and a strong learning culture.”
(CSCI, 2006)

Hence, supporting candidates to undertake the PQ Specialist Award can contribute not only to increasing the number of practice learning days offered within your organisation, but in turn can bring additional recognised benefits of improving the quality of service delivery, encouraging strategic human resource planning and development as a learning organisation.

*Practice Learning will no longer be a PI beyond April 2008

Investors in People

The Investors in People (IIP) Standard is a business improvement tool designed to enhance an organisation's performance through its people. Included within this standard is a strong emphasis upon learning and development activities being used to achieve organisational objectives and outcomes.

IIP provides 10 indicators, each of which has to be achieved in order to meet the standard. Amongst these are indicators that encourage organisations to have a clear understanding of their organisation's learning and development needs and to have in place plans and resources to enable them to meet these objectives, along with processes for evaluating outcomes. Specific IIP indicators that could be linked to PQ include:

Indicator 2:

Learning and development is planned to achieve the organisation's objectives

Indicator 8:

People learn and develop effectively

Indicator 9:

Investment in people improves the performance of the organisation

Therefore, for organisations that have achieved accredited IIP status (or are striving to achieve this), PQ can contribute towards attainment of IIP indicators for those that embed this award within their workforce planning strategy.

Good practice example from the London Borough of Newham

At one point, Newham was one of the lowest performing Local Authorities for Practice Learning. However, over the last 4 years we have now turned this around having previously worked closely with the Practice Learning Taskforce, learning from their research. In 2005-2006 Newham was the seventh best performing borough in the country (as per CSCI report). Newham has a deep commitment to supporting practice learning and recognise the benefits that this brings to the student, teams and the organisation as a whole.

We now offer as a minimum 1 placement in every social work team across both service areas and many teams take up to 3 students in any academic year (depending on placement days).

Feedback from teams that take social work students report positive experiences, for example, students bring up-to-date information on social care theory and research often resulting in generating new ideas and ways of thinking within the team.

We recognise that practice assessors are a valuable asset to the organisation and contribute considerably to creating a culture of learning within the organisation. Although practice assessing can be a rewarding task it can also be quite challenging, particularly when juggling the competing demands of existing workloads whilst at the same time meeting the needs of the student. In acknowledging the assessors valued role, we have responded creatively to rewarding their hard work and commitment, for example, by offering health and wellbeing days and regular support groups.

The department also pays an honorarium payment to the practice assessors and rewards teams that accommodate students. More recently we have become part of a partnership with 4 other boroughs where practice assessors come together to share good practice and exchange ideas in order to learn together.

In addition to the placements generated in the department, there are many placements in the private, voluntary and independent sectors and practice assessors in these sectors are also involved in and access the above mentioned initiatives.

Teresa Reid,
Learning & Organisational
Development Officer,
London Borough of Newham

Section five

Post-Qualifying Awards and how they can benefit recruitment and retention strategies

“Recruitment and retention is a priority for social care across the wide range of workers and types of service. A consistent approach to CPD is essential if the issues faced by the sector are to be successfully tackled.” (SfC/CWDC, 2006)

“Recruitment and retention is central to the functioning of social care businesses as:

- Poor recruitment and retention adversely affects service user experiences – service improvement requires a workforce which is stable as significant change is estimated to take a three year period.
- High staff turnover leads to higher caseloads, low morale and a reactive approach to service delivery, which in turn creates more discontent which causes people to look for other posts
- The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development estimates that it takes a year for new recruits into a post to function at their full potential.” (Skills for Care, 2006)

England has approximately 78,749 registered social workers (GSCC, 2007), and London has the greatest number of registered social workers with approximately 9,732 social workers within its region (GSCC, 2007). However, recruitment and retention of staff remains a problem, with London vacancy rates for children social workers being approximately 17.5% (Local Authority Workforce Intelligence Group, 2006). As a result, social workers are in high demand and have increased options when selecting an employer of choice.

Providing and supporting professional development opportunities for staff is an effective workforce strategy by which employers can attract new employees.

“An employer who provides good opportunities for CPD and a positive learning environment to support learners will be more attractive than another.” (Scottish Executive, 2005)

Research demonstrates that employers who support achievement of PQ awards increase an organisations’ potential for retaining staff currently employed.

A recent Post Hoc Survey Evaluation undertaken by Rowland’s (2006) on the post-qualifying awards reveals that 38% of award holders concluded they were more likely to remain with their employer upon completing the award, possibly due to the opportunities for career progression.

The three highest motivators for candidates undertaking the post-qualifying award were:

- to increase job prospects
- develop skills
- validate existing skills.

Other reasons for undertaking the award included: overseas workers gaining insight into UK practice, getting a head start on future training needs, increase knowledge of current research and to improving expertise for the benefit of people who use services and carers.

“The vision for 2020... reward systems provide effective incentives to workers to enhance their skills and performance and progress their careers.” (DoH, 2006)

Recommendations on employer support of candidates include identifying contingency plans. This could include areas such as study leave, workload relief, line manager attendance at training and candidate attendance at taught sessions. It is also suggested that devising a formal contract between employer and employee could act as a staff retention aid. Such a contract could stipulate a requirement that employees remain with their employer for a set period after completion to ensure that the PQ qualified part of the workforce does not migrate to other local authorities. (Rowland, 2006)

Although local authorities vary in their approach to linking achievement of post-qualifying awards to retention, reward and progression strategies for staff, it is found that doing so is more likely to increase an organisations ability to retain a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. This not only applies to ‘frontline’ staff, but also those in leadership and management roles.

Practice Learning as a Recruitment Strategy

As previously mentioned, practice learning has strong links to the revised PQ framework, and can also be used as an effective recruitment strategy.

There is increasing evidence to suggest that many newly qualified social workers have previously undertaken practice learning with their employing authority, and the Practice Learning Taskforce states that approximately 39% of students take up positions in organisations where they undertook their practice learning.

www.practicelearning.org.uk/index.php?id=44

“The quality of a student’s experience impacts upon their view of the authority as a potential employer. Investment in high quality practice learning is therefore something local authorities should consider as part of their recruitment strategy.”
(Parker et al, 2006)

Experiences from the London Borough of Sutton

The London Borough of Sutton has strongly invested in the Post-Qualifying programmes for many years, and embedded attainment of these Awards within workforce planning and HR strategies. For example, achievement of the PQ1 (now equivalent to the consolidation module) has led to a one-off payment, whilst the achievement of the full award was linked to promotion in becoming a senior social worker, or an additional annual increment if the employee was already in a senior post.

Currently, there are some indicators that suggest supporting the professional development of staff in this way has led to employees remaining committed to working for the borough. We will be looking to see how this evolves with the new framework.

Margaret Delpy,
Qualifications Advisor,
London Borough of Sutton

Experiences from the London Borough of Newham

Although we have not kept any particularly statistical data other than that required for the Delivery Improvement Statement (DIS), we recognise that providing positive practice learning experiences to social work students has generated recruitment opportunities for the borough, with many students applying for positions upon completion of their qualification.

In recognising the connection between offering placements and potential recruitment, as of 2007-8 we will be offering all final year students placed within the borough of Newham the opportunity to be interviewed for permanent positions.

Teresa Reid,
Learning & Organisational
Development Officer,
London Borough of Newham

The information contained in this document is by no means exhaustive, but aims to provide a brief overview of some of the key components that can be used towards developing a business case for PQ.

The revised Post-Qualifying framework provides an exciting opportunity to not only embed continuing professional development into the future of social care work, but to also raise the standards of social work as a profession along with improving the quality of service delivery.

If you would like to provide feedback on this document, or wish to share good practice examples of how you are integrating the revised PQ framework into your workforce strategies, we are keen to hear from you. Please email: Edith.lfkwuna@skillsforcare.org.uk



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